

Literary Cabinet.

Si non tantus fructus perciperetur ex his studiis, quantum percipi constat,
sed ex his delectatio sola peteretur; tamen hæc animi remissio judicanda
esset libero homine dignissima.

CICERO.

VOL. I.] YALE COLLEGE, SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 1807. [No. 17.

The Essayist.

No. XII.

The Pleasures and Advantages of Taste, vindicated.

IN no one particular is human nature more consistent with itself, than in holding a diversity of opinion. This is undoubtedly upon the whole, a wise law of nature, and productive of beneficial effects. Since by far the greater number of human decisions respect matters of opinion, and not of science, it is by no means wonderful that in subjects which are rather to be felt than demonstrated, this diversity of opinion should exist. A remarkable specimen of singularity of opinion is exhibited by some, who hold that taste is prejudicial to happiness and to virtue, and that the destitution of it is rather to be coveted, than the possession. On this subject we wish not to contest with any one the privilege of enjoying his own sentiments, for in this case "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." But it is truly ridiculous for a few individuals, in whom either nature has not implanted, or habit has stifled or eradicated this faculty, to erect themselves into a tribunal to prescribe methods of thinking for the rest of mankind, and to make the sug-

gestions of their own distempered brain the standard by which to try the correctness of general opinion. The assertions of these men are contrary to the decisions of reason, as well as the voice of experience. It is the intention of nature that pleasure should attend the exercise of all our faculties. This gratification the benevolent author of nature has annexed as the reward of our exertions; and as a declaration of his intention, he has implanted the love of beauty, grandeur, and novelty, in the soul, to stimulate us in the exercise of our faculties, to contemplate and investigate his wonderful works, that we might thereby learn his character, and admire and adore his infinite wisdom and goodness.

There is nothing incredible in the supposition, that between the soul at its first formation and the rest of nature, a mutual harmony and sympathy may have been established, which being cherished by timely culture, becomes the source of perennial delight. Hence to have all the faculties of the soul in vigorous exercise, and to raise them to their highest degree of improvement, is to attain the greatest sum of human enjoyment; to neglect the cultivation of any one, is to diminish

the sources of happiness. With taste are connected all the tender feelings, and pleasurable emotions of the soul, and to be unsusceptible of any agreeable impressions from the scenery of nature, indicates a man originally callous or phlegmatic, or vitiated and perverted by habit.—

Whatever the mere mathematician, whose intellect relishes nothing but demonstration and diagrams, may have decided on this subject; or the metaphysician, who, enamored with abstractions and essences, sacrifices all the common enjoyments of life, at the shrine of his beloved object; the man of cultivated taste will hardly be persuaded to abandon his pursuit, or yield the decisions of his own experience, to the opinions of those who are strangers to any such pleasurable sensations.

Men are fond of ascribing the pre-eminence to that branch of literature in which they have become the greatest proficients, and of esteeming that the only manly pursuit, by which they, in their own estimation, have attained to such personal consequence. By a long habituation to intellectual researches, the student is led to idolize his own understanding, and at the same time conceiving a disrelish for the external appearances of nature, he smiles with pity and astonishment on the votaries of taste.

As an objection against the cultivation of taste, it is said that by increasing sensibility, it is productive of melancholy and despondence. But the sensations of melancholy to a certain degree, are so far from being undesirable, that they are the most desirable affections of the soul; melancholy is by all persons of sensibility

esteemed a dainty. It seems to furnish a medium through which the errors and infirmities of mankind rise in review before us and claim our commiseration, and feeling ourselves involved in the same common lot, we love to sympathise with the weaker part of our nature.

Melancholy is no doubt a concomitant, if not a constituent part of genius. Of this the man possessing a strong sensibility to the beauties of nature, is frequently in no small degree the subject, and in the indulgence of it he finds at times the highest gratification. It is this mixture of melancholy that renders former scenes so agreeable upon a retrospect; it is this that gives delight to the memory of joys that are past. The thousand wild associations that throng into the mind, add to the splendor of the imagery, which passing in quick succession, he wishes to detain in its progress, and render the scene perpetual.

The sensibility of the man of taste not only contributes to happiness, but, if properly directed, is highly congenial to virtue. It is truly astonishing to observe the indifference of men of sordid minds, or philosophical apathy, before whom all the glories of heaven and earth pass in daily succession, without touching their hearts, elevating their fancy, or animating their devotion; while the man of taste sees universal nature clothed in smiles, and reflecting, as in a mirror, the perfections of its benevolent author. With rapture he catches the music of the groves, with transport he inhales the fragrance of the zephyr. Every pulsation of his heart seems to elevate him above the humid earth, and his soul,

catching the enthusiasm, longs to soar into a higher region. He rises superior to the weakness of mortality, and longs to hold converse with kindred spirits. The sentiment of admiration immediately transports him into the bosom of the Deity—All nature around in harmonious accents announces to him a present Divinity, and uniting in the general symphony, he exclaims, “These are thy works, mighty Parent of good”—“The whole world is full of thy glory.” In the very moment of his elevation, melancholy appears, but she comes not an unwelcome guest; nay, he courts her embrace as the perfecter of his felicity. For while his soul borne on the wings of imagination, aspires to celestial regions, his consciousness at the same time informs him, that he is the child of want and of imperfection, and by no means exempted from the common evils of life. Here melancholy lends her soothing and sympathising aid to the feelings of his imperfection; realizes to him his true condition; and in holding up to view the dark side of the picture, by the contrast brightens his pleasure as well as his devotion. As much evil both natural and moral, discovers itself in the present system, this the man of sensibility strongly realizes. Having all the internal mechanism of his soul, in unison with the objects without him, he feels for the evils of his fellow men, and tenderly sympathises in their sufferings. Nature’s richest scenery, while it inspires him with rapture, reads to him in silent, yet forcible language, the lesson of his own frailty—and while his enthusiasm bids him exult in the prospect, the voice of conscience whispers,

remember thou art mortal. Thus to the mind of native sensibility, the dark as well as the luminous side of the picture rises to view. And the face of universal nature appears suffused with a tinge of melancholy. Conscious that all created systems are hastening to decay, that he himself must soon bid adieu to all terrestrial objects, while he sees vanity inscribed on all human pursuits, and feels the insufficiency of these fugitive joys, he reclines into the bosom of that Being, in whom resides the plenitude of perfection and consolation.

As he realises more strongly than others the sudden vicissitudes of things with greater eagerness than they, he seizes and improves the moments as they fly. Their very transitoriness, instead of diminishing, enhances their value. Earthly prospects he feels to be fleeting, hence he prizes them the more during the moments of their progress, because soon, ah, soon! they will have become irrevocable. When retired from the sight of men into some sequestered retreat, he apostrophises the groves, the fountains and the rocks, and calls them to witness his fervency and sincerity, and as if apprehensive that this were the last parting scene, to all his farewell accents they seem to re-echo—Adieu! This is the season when he especially realizes the precarious tenure of life, and the vanity of human expectations, and while by an eye of faith he presents to his view a nobler and more enduring object, he pants for a nearer union, and would count him his enemy who would persuade him that man in his present state is to be immortal.

PILGRIM.

Sir Malcolme,

A FRAGMENT.

[Continued from page 125.]

AS every thing in the Abbey bore such an air of mystery, and as it was so near day, he determined not to unarm. Accordingly, placing his sword and shield by its side, he flung himself upon the bed, and in a few minutes, through mere weariness, fell asleep. But his mind had been so much affected by the scene he had witnessed in the wood, and by the suspicious circumstances he had met with in the Abbey, he did not enjoy his slumbers undisturbed. Horrid forms continually flitted before him, and at length wrought so forcibly upon his imagination that he awoke. As soon as he had opened his eyes, he saw standing at the foot of his bed, the figure of a man, holding a sickly taper in one hand, and drawing back the curtain with the other. His tall thin form was wrapped in a long black robe, girt about the waist with a leathern belt. His pale, death-like face was half shaded by a large black cowl, and his blue eyes gleamed so strangely upon Sir Malcolme, that he started from the bed in an agony of terror. Seizing his sword and shield in a frenzied manner, with his sword brandished aloft, he advanced towards the figure: Immediately its countenance assumed a ghastlier paleness—it moved one step forward, and with a frown, that immediately relaxed into a smile of contempt, beckoned him to follow it. Sir Malcolme stirred not from his place. The figure moved a few steps towards the other side of the room, and then waving its lean arm on high, again beckoned him

to follow it. Provoked even to desperation, he followed it to the other side of the room. It then stretched forth its hand and touched the wall—immediately a door concealed by the hangings, flew open, and discovered a narrow flight of steps. Here Sir Malcolme's heart made a most fearful pause—it seemed like descending to his grave—but reckless of life, he rushed down after the man with the taper. Having descended the stairs, in passing through a narrow spaceway, he turned to look behind him; and on again turning to pursue his way, the taper and the figure who bore it were gone, and he was left in total darkness. However, pursuing his course strait onward, cautiously extending his arms, and feeling before him; in a short time he found himself in a room resembling the one he had first entered. The moon faintly glimmering through a ruined window, cast its uncertain rays directly upon one of the pillars. Against it Sir Malcolme discovered a knight leaning, richly armed, but wounded. On one side lay his shield inlaid with gold; and on the other, his casque shorn of its plumes, and divided asunder. Sir Malcolme had began to inquire into his situation, when he was interrupted by the screams of a female voice. At this, the stranger seemed agonized with horror—his black hair, dropping with gore, stood erect—he ejaculated ‘*My Sister!*’ and fell dead at Sir Malcolme’s feet. The screams at intervals continued, and Sir Malcolme, who had a heart to feel for the distress of the unfortunate, and a hand to redress their wrongs, followed the sound as nearly as he was able. After wandering for

some time, through various apartments, sometimes stumbling over loose fragments of stone, and at others stepping into deep holes he at length arrived in a long narrow room, at the farther end of which he discerned a ray of light. On bending his course towards it he perceived that it proceeded from the adjoining apartment, through a fracture in the wall, about large enough to admit the body of a man. He kneeled down, and, looking through, perceived that it communicated with the chapel. Directly before him stood the altar; and at the lower end, by the light of some torches which they held, he saw a dozen or fifteen armed men engaged in hot dispute. A little on one side stood another man with his back against one of the columns, detaining an elegant female, who struggled violently to escape. Sir Malcolme now had in view the object of his search: and he crept through into the chapel. It was necessary to use the utmost caution, lest the light of the torches, playing upon his silver armour, should betray him. He therefore moved silently along in the shade of the altar, and softly stealing from pillar to pillar, at length arrived behind that where the man stood with the lady. At this moment, raising her lovely face to Heaven, she said, "God of mercy, help me!"— But what were Sir Malcolme's emotions when in her face and voice he recognized the face and voice of his long lost, his adored Rosamond. Every fear respecting himself quickly vanished— His arm seemed trebly nerved, and he burned to deliver her from the villains by whom she was surrounded. Meanwhile the dispute grew louder and louder, and

the men were on the point of coming to blows, when he who held Rosamond drew his dagger, and aiming it at her defenceless bosom, cried, "Since it's come to this, I'll quickly end your contest." At this inst. Sir Malcolme started forth, and at a blow clove the ruffian to the waist. He then furiously rushed among the remaining villains, and quickly laid four breathless at his feet; but overpowered by numbers he must inevitably have perished, had not

* * * * *

RATCLIFFE.

*On the Cultivation of a Taste
for the Beauties of Nature.*

[Continued from page 126.]

SUCH then is the view, which the man of taste takes of Nature, and such the general advantages which he derives from her. But these are capable of being particularly pointed out, and to them therefore I shall direct my attention.

To suppose that the Deity formed the admirable system, in the midst of which we live, and diffused over creation that ever changing beauty, for which it is distinguished, without intending that they should be the objects of our contemplation, is indeed inconsistent. Having manifested his character to us through this medium, he certainly designed that we should study it. Hence we see the dignified Nature of the fine arts, since formed on such a model. This leads us to a more particular examination of poetry and painting, which may be looked upon as the principal.

Poetry, being an imitation of the works of the Deity, may be considered as a tribute of praise and gratitude from man to his

Creator. The exalted nature of this art is also discovered from the scriptures, in which we meet with the finest strains of poetry, in point of sublimity, tenderness and richness of description. If we turn our attention to the different nations of the world, we shall perceive that they have almost invariably been attached to this art. We know that rude tribes are always distinguished for this. The bards among the northern nations, inflamed the courage of the warriors by their songs, which were equally prized in the hour of victory and festive joy. Hence those frequent expressions of the venerable Ossian, "Raise thy voice on high, O son of the song, and tell the deeds of other times. Pleasant are the words of the song and lovely are the tales of other times." Among polished nations, poetry has been ever held in the highest esteem. The genius of Greece glories in the laurels of Homer and Pindar, no less than in those of Pericles and Epaminondas; and Britannia laments the loss of Shakespeare and Milton, as much as the deaths of Hampden and Marlborough. Poetry in a word is the source of delight to the savage, of pleasure to the civilized, and of the highest enjoyment to the refined. It is this, which kindles our enthusiasm, excites our pity and rouses the noblest passions of the soul. With justice may we then exclaim in the language of the ardent Lucan,

"O sacer et magnus vatum labor!
omnia fato

"Eripis, et populis donas mortali-
bus avum."—P. 9. 981.

If poetry is originally founded upon Nature and that we find the poet's style employed in copying her, how can we expect to form

a just estimate of his merits, or to relish his beauties without studying those scenes which he has so sedulously imitated? If we turn over his pages, we shall find that he charms us most, when he has followed her most closely. If we examine his works and compare them with the source, whence they were derived, we shall discover fresh reason to admire him. The descriptions of the poet, being representations of sensible objects, render it necessary for us to see in order to judge. Let us

..... rove, in wonder wrapt,
Beneath the precipice, o'erhung
with pine,
And see on high, amid'st th' encir-
cling groves,
From cliff to cliff the foaming tor-
rents shine;
While waters, woods and winds in
concert join,
And Echo swells the chorus to the
skies,

and then shall we be able to estimate the real merit of this fine piece of painting from the pencil of Beattie. All of us have witnessed repeatedly the beauties of the landscape, when the sun is setting after a shower; but how can we expect to relish them, if we will not pause and examine. How then shall we be capacitated to enjoy those with which Thomson presents us, when he describes the downward sun as looking

..... out effulgent from amid the
flush
Of broken clouds, gay shifting to
his beam.
The rapid radiance instantaneous
strikes
Th' illumined mountain, thro' the
forest streams,
Shakes on the floods and thro' the
yellow mist,
In twinkling myriads lights the
dewy gems,
Moist, bright and green the land-
scape laughs around.

This beautiful picture is full of

the most lively images, faithfully copied from Nature, and he who wishes to relish the transcript must study the original.

Titian, it is said, was wont to labor his pieces extremely and then, by a few masterly strokes, gave them that appearance of life and Nature, for which they are so celebrated. As it was with him, so also is it with every great poet, in whose descriptions are ever found some delicate touches of inimitable grace, which infuse a magic beauty to the scene. And this is the dictate of Nature, for we discover in her works a variety of apparent trifles, which have a very fine effect. Who has ever observed the soft purple hue, which tips the distant mountain, the various tints of the forest on the hill-side or the evening star scarce seen thro' the light, grey clouds, and has not felt the beauty of these objects. Of this circumstance we accordingly observe the poet constantly availing himself. Scarcely can we turn to any celebrated author and not find numerous instances of what I have stated. How beautiful is the following image which Rogers employs to heighten his description of evening, in the *Pleasures of Memory*:

"And now the Moon had dimmed,
With dewy ray,
"The few fine flushes of departing
day."

What can be more happily conceived than this thought of Ossian, in his address to the evening star. "Thou dost smile and depart. The waves come with joy around thee, and bathe thy lovely hair." And even in a poet of our own country, we have an extremely fine instance of this kind, where, describing a traveller, reclining in a shady vale, he says,

"..... then, while the breeze,
"With soft and gentle soothing,
whispers peace,
"The surge, far murmuring on the
distant shore,
"If faintly heard, makes calmness
still more calm."

Very frequently the heightening which is given to a scene by one of these delicate touches, is conveyed in a single word. Thus, with what success does Campbell say,

"Why do those cliffs of shadowy tint
appear
"More sweet than all the landscape
smiling near?"

And how greatly is the beauty of these lines, from Akenside, enhanced by the epithets, which he employs:

"..... 'Twas a *horrid* pile
"Of hills, with many a *shaggy* for-
est, mixed
"With many a *sable* cliff and *glit-*
tering stream.

Now, these are images which are only discoverable by him who seeks for them. We may admire the beauty of the valley, or the grandeur of the mountain, the deep shades of the forest, or the varied green of the meadow, but attention only can teach us to feel the enthusiasm of true taste. Nature has formed her works so as to delight us at the first glance; but for her votaries only is reserved the refined pleasure, which springs from an acquaintance with the graces and delicacies of scenery.

[To be continued.]

NOTE..... The author of the communication, under the signature of G. must be sensible, that the merits of no production can be justly estimated while it appears only in part; especially if that part be the preface. It will, therefore, be necessary before the Editors can, with propriety, insert it, that he should favor them with some further specimen—the merits or demerits of which must guide their judgment.

The Bower.

Sometimes
We bid bright Fiction to resemble Truth,
And sometimes speak what Truth herself approves.

HES. THEOC.

CHARADE.

MY *first*, so much regarded, has bent
the stubborn knee,
Has bow'd the mind to Cupid, has set
the prisoner free ;
E'en Beauty must without it, in vain
have had her charms :
Yea, grace had lost her graces ; nor
comets given alarms—
The sun and moon, and stars too, in
vain perhaps had shone,
Or only served to ripen the products
of each zone.
Proud man had been a novice, a moun-
tain seemed a plain,
And every golden strata remained a
massy vein.
The vernal rose and flowret, that now
so verdant bloom,
No virgin-hand had cropped—all na-
ture worn a gloom.
My *second*, rough and rugged, in
mountains mocks the storms,
Or flits upon the Zephyr as bees are
wont to swarm.
From huge opaque, and common its
form improved is seen
In diaphoric gem, or the jasper tinged
with green :
Annihilate its parts then, they every
where abound,
And Temples, Thrones, Cathedrals,
must tumble to the ground.
Yea, earth itself unburthen'd, must
feel the sudden shock,
And Neptune thus advantag'd, the
strength of nature rock.
Considered then, as two things un-
friendly, both remain,
And driven to embraces, each touch
is only pain ;
Indeed my last, the stronger will un-
relenting prove,
Nor yield for tears or anguish, its sta-
tion or its love ;
But stern and most tenacious will hold
its torturing place :
The other writhes and struggles to rid
the harsh embrace.
No kind relief is given. But strange
indeed to tell !
Take both my names in union, they're
like a magic spell,

They quick explore the region in
which exists this war,
Drive out the harsh intruder, and put
all pain afar.
Thus gentle is the pleasure and pla-
cid is the ease,
Produc'd by this kind agent, whose
office all is peace.
In brief, without my *first* then, my *last*
had ne'er been seen ;
My *last* a foe t' my *first*, has ever hos-
tile been ;
But when they're both in union, all
warfare is destroy'd,
My *first* alone is sensible, my *first* is
overjoy'd.
This riddle strange in statement, em-
bracing pain and pleasure,
Deserves a guess, kind reader—you
hence may need *its treasure*.

—
..... Quid, inquit,
Me Fugis ?

OVID. MET. Lib. iii. v. 383.

While sitting by the murmuring rill,
Which gently glided down the hill,
And tinkling ran to yonder mill,
I heard a mournful sigh.
Methought I'd often heard the sound,
And, springing quickly from the
ground,
I look'd towards a rising mound,
And saw Belinda nigh.
In mournful accents then I cried,
As soon as I the maid descried,
Then o'er the hillock saw her glide ;
She hsten'd to depart.
Ah me ! she would not grant the boon
I ask'd ; but through the meadow run,
And flew away, alas, too soon,
And pain'd my swelling heart.
In vain I strive to win the maid,
In vain I wander in the glade,
For Cupid will not give me aid,
And lend his pointed shaft.
In pity, little urchin, hear
My plaintive cries, and drop a tear,
For I have every thing to fear
From fair Belinda's craft.

C.